

Eulogy March 31 2019

Denis Preka Memorial

I have been asked by Denis' family to say a few words this evening. It is a great honor for me to be able to do so.

This has been a difficult time, I think, for all of us, as we come to grips with Denis' loss. I think it's fair to say that none of us thought this is how we would spend the last Sunday in March. I think it's fair to say that none of us wanted to be here. But all of us know we need to be here.

We need to be here to pay our respects to Denis. To honor a life well-lived. Too short, to be sure. But a life full of joy and full of love.

We need to be here to help to console his family. His adoring mother, Linda, and his step-dad, Jamie and his siblings, who he loved with all his heart. His family members from Albania, who traveled halfway around the world to say goodbye.

And we need to be here to grieve his loss. It is so hard for us to understand and accept God's plan for Denis – why He called Denis home so soon. But that is what we are called to do. That is what our faith teaches us we must do.

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Denis was a faithful servant of the Lord; a great son and brother; grandson and nephew; a great friend to so many. He brought joy to so many lives.

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Denis was born in Italy in 1997 and he came to the United States with his mother one year later. Like a lot of immigrants, they came to the United States to start a new life. Even though he was born in Italy, Denis knew his family's roots are in Albania, and he was very proud of his Albanian heritage.

Denis and his mother formed a special bond. He had great love and respect, pride and admiration for his mother.

Anyone who knows Linda knows that she has fierce courage and determination and an indomitable spirit. She carved out a life here for her and Denis and began to work even before she learned English. She started a very successful commercial cleaning business after Chef Aldo convinced Joe Vicari to give her a chance cleaning the Andiamo's Restaurants. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan was also one of her first customers. And now Linda and Jamie run a very busy and successful travel agency, where Denis also worked.

In an Instagram post two years ago, Denis said this about his mother:

I've been so blessed to have a mother strong enough to bring me to the United States, raise me on her own, create a business that gave us the ability get me to better schools, us into better houses, around better people. She's truly [amazing], she's never taken [stuff] from anybody and she's the most loving woman on the planet. She loves you with all of her soul, heart, spirit and all she asks for in return is a hug back. It's beautiful and she gets it from my sweet Nana Leze (Lisa) [his grandmother].

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Denis was extremely proud of his mom. He wanted to be like her – he even started his own travel business just last month, Amerigo Travel. Denis had big plans. He definitely inherited his mom’s knack for business.

Denis traveled widely and loved being able to see and experience the world. He spoke four languages: English, French, Italian and Albanian.

Denis was a very good student. He graduated with honors from St. Lawrence Catholic School and De La Salle Collegiate High School, and was attending the University of Detroit, where he carried a 3.8 grade point average and was majoring in business and psychology. It was his dream to attend the Ross Business School at the University of Michigan, and to pursue a career in business law.

Denis made a lot of friends at each of those places, and I know a lot of his friends are here tonight. His friends gathered last week at a vigil for Denis in Detroit – the event was organized by the Albanian-American Student Organization at U of D, an organization that Denis founded to help the students of Albanian descent network together and celebrate their heritage.

Denis was very social. He had friends everywhere. He was very active in many organizations. While at De La Salle, he founded the Model UN program. He also swam, played lacrosse and soccer, and ran track and field.

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At U of D, he again founded and participated in the Model UN program. He organized a team of 21 delegates that attended conferences in Chicago, New York, Grand Rapids and Columbus, winning many awards. He was also active in Student Government, and in the college's Entrepreneur Club. He organized the college's Soccer Club and was in the process of helping to found a new chapter of a men's fraternity. Denis drafted bylaws and constitutions and very detailed business plans for all of these organizations. He was a very busy young man!

Denis loved to make people happy. He had a playful personality and always found a way to make people smile. He loved playing the guitar and started singing karaoke. He was quite a conversationalist and loved to discuss and debate philosophy and psychology with his friends. He had wit and charm and social grace, and was always engaged in the conversation, listening to the other person, and somehow directing the conversation to where he wanted it to go.

Denis was interested in everything, and he had unlimited potential. He was a passionate and driven young man. He loved to travel. He started many organizations and businesses to help people and bring them together. He had a tender heart and loved kids, including mine. He loved to play with my son Tony.

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I came to know Linda and Denis because of Linda's involvement in the community. I think, from the moment we met, she and Denis always treated me, and my siblings, as part of their extended family.

I was privileged to serve as Denis' confirmation sponsor, and to attend his high school graduation. He looked up to me, and was thinking about a career in law or politics, along with his business pursuits. Denis affectionately referred to me as his Godfather – and so, as he recently told Senator Pete Lucido, defending the Constitution ran deep in his veins. He was proud, I think, to have a judge in the family, and I know Denis was bursting with pride when I was appointed to the Michigan Supreme Court.

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Denis was a bright, shining light – he left an indelible mark on everyone he touched. Before I close tonight, and give others a chance to share their memories of Denis, I would like to read from **Psalm 23** which is a **psalm of David**:

The Lord is my shepard; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

Beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side,

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With you rod and your staff that give me courage.
You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows;
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

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To Linda and Jamie, Rowan and Lauren, on behalf of the Viviano family, we offer our deepest condolences. We loved Denis, and I know that he loved us.

His life was too short, but his amazing legacy will live on in the hearts and memories of his family and friends.

Denis was a good and kind and faithful servant, and we take comfort knowing that now he dwells in the house of the Lord.

May God bless you, Linda, and bring you comfort.